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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Iran
- [1](#)2. Mideast
- [1](#)3. U.S.-Israel Relations

Key stories in the media:

Various media reported that yesterday the IAF assassinated senior

Islamic Jihad militant Khaled ShaQalan in northern Gaza. Another senior militant and five other Palestinians were wounded in the raid. The media cited the organization's threat of retaliation. Israel Radio reported that this morning the IAF killed two Palestinians in the central Gaza refugee camp of El-Mazari. The radio reported that two rockets landed in Israel this morning.

HaQaretz reported that Israel will increase the range of goods permitted into the Gaza Strip as a gesture to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who concluded her visit to the region yesterday. In recent weeks, Israel has prevented such products as jam, pasta, and paper from reaching the besieged coastal territory. "We want humanitarian aid to get into Gaza in sufficient amounts to alleviate the suffering of the people," Clinton was quoted as saying, but stopped short of calling for a full opening of the crossings. HaQaretz quoted a senior Jerusalem source as saying yesterday: "Even though the pasta issue was solved last week, this entire episode has made us look ridiculous in the eyes of the world. It's too bad we have to wait for pressure from Europe and the U.S., and we couldn't rescind the measure on our own." The media reported that, before her departure, Clinton visited PA President Mahmoud Abbas and Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad in Ramallah, where she promised vigorous and personal involvement in stalled Mideast peace efforts and criticized Israel's demolition of Palestinian homes in Jerusalem as unhelpful. Clinton also displayed strong public support for Abbas. Maariv reported that Clinton stressed that the new U.S. administration supports the PA and views it as a partner in the peace process. HaQaretz quoted Secretary Clinton as saying during a news conference in Ramallah: "The Palestinian Authority is the only legitimate government of the Palestinian people," she told a news conference, standing next to Abbas. Talking to reporters after meeting Clinton, Abbas criticized Iran, one of Hamas' main backers. He charged that Iran is trying to deepen the Palestinian divide and said Iran needs to take care of its own issues and not intervene in Palestinian affairs.

Media reported that, in recent days, Israel has issued orders for the demolition of dozens of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem, saying the homes were built illegally. Palestinians say they cannot receive proper building permits from Israeli authorities, and the planned demolitions are a means to assert Israel's control over the disputed city. "Clearly, this kind of activity is unhelpful," Clinton said, adding that she would raise it with the Israeli government as well as municipal officials in Jerusalem. She said such actions violate the Roadmap. HaQaretz quoted Hatem Abdul Qader, a Palestinian official on Jerusalem affairs, as saying that Clinton spoke shortly after Israel issued a new order to demolish five residential buildings containing 55 apartments, saying: "It's an open demographic war." He said lawyers have challenged the orders, halting demolitions until March 10. HaQaretz quoted Stephan Miller, a spokesman for city hall, as saying that the buildings under demolition notice were empty and had been built illegally. HaQaretz reported that Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat charged that Palestinians had fed Clinton misinformation and that they were taking advantage of her visit to push their agenda. He said that the buildings were built on area that the municipality had set aside as open spaces and parks. Yesterday HaQaretz published a letter signed by 23 Israel Prize laureates including A.B. Yehoshua, Amos Oz, David Grossman, Nathan Zach, Prof. Ze'ev Sternhell, Shulamit Aloni and Lia van Leer, protesting Barkat's intention to demolish illegally-built buildings in East Jerusalem.

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The Jerusalem Post bannered a report -- "Preventing a Cascade of Instability" -- issued yesterday by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy according to which Israel is seriously considering taking unilateral military action to stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. The report also says Israel's time frame for action is growing shorter, not only because of Iranian advances, but because Tehran might soon acquire upgraded air defenses and disperse its nuclear program to additional locations. The report also argues that international sanctions against Iran need to be intensified urgently for the engagement the Obama administration is planning with Tehran to be effective. An early draft of the report was endorsed by Dennis Ross before he withdrew upon joining the Obama administration, in which he is serving as a special representative dealing with various countries in the region, including Iran. Senator Evan Bayh of the Senate Select Committee

on Intelligence, and Congressman Gary Ackerman, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, were among the signatories. The bipartisan group also recommended increasing security guarantees and the supply of missile defenses and other protective measures to allies in the Middle East, both to reassure them of America's commitment to them and to dampen the perceived effectiveness, and hence appeal, of nuclear weapons for Iran. However, The Jerusalem Post reported that the report, several of whose authors met with high-level Israeli officials to assess their perspective, notes that Israel is not interested in becoming part of an American nuclear umbrella, even as Gulf countries want more assurances on that front. Top of Form

HaQaretz and other media reported that Netanyahu is expected to meet with Yisrael Beiteinu leader Avigdor Lieberman today to discuss the formation of a coalition government. Lieberman will ask Netanyahu to give him the Foreign Ministry portfolio and to keep Justice Minister Daniel Friedmann in office. The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that Netanyahu will press Lieberman to accept the treasury portfolio instead. Media reported that, in addition, Lieberman is expected to ask his faction be given the communications; industry trade and labor, and interior security portfolios. Although Netanyahu has reportedly largely agreed to make Lieberman his foreign minister, he is thought to still be weighing the potential political damage the appointment of the hawkish politicians would do to the image of his government. Netanyahu faces strong opposition from within his party, particularly as former FM MK Silvan Shalom told Netanyahu in a private meeting that the only portfolio he was interested in was the Foreign Ministry and that, during the election campaign. Netanyahu had promised to give him the post. Shas's mouthpiece Yom Leyom reported that Shas would get the Interior, Housing and Construction, Religious Affairs, and likely the Health portfolios. Yom Leyom also reported that Shas will get the Israel Lands Administration. HaQaretz reported that Lieberman allegedly received hundreds of thousands of shekels when he was a Knesset member and a minister from the company established by his daughter. According to the investigation, Lieberman allegedly received the money as severance pay, after working for the company for only two years.

HaQaretz and Israel Radio reported that British Foreign Office Minister Bill Rammell told a parliamentary committee in London yesterday that the British government is open to talks with Hizbullah's political wing. "We have reconsidered the position...in light of more positive developments within Lebanon. For that reason we have explored establishing contacts." He said he was referring to the formation in July last year of a unity government in which Hizbullah and its allies hold effective veto power, as agreed under a deal that ended a paralyzing political conflict in the country. The media reported that Hizbullah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah attended an anti-Zionist convention in Tehran.

HaQaretz reported that yesterday Netanyahu sidelined Israel's Ambassador to the U.S. Sallai Meridor, asking him to leave the room during a meeting with Secretary Clinton in Jerusalem. The newspaper quoted Netanyahu's office as saying yesterday: The Americans decided that only three participants from each side stay at the meeting. HaQaretz noted that an unexpected attendee at the meeting was former Israeli diplomat Alon Pinkas, an associate of Labor Party leader Ehud Barak. Pinkas became friends with Clinton during his tenure in New York and has recently been advising Netanyahu on Israel's ties with the U. S.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday Housing and Construction Minister Zeev Boim (Kadima) tacked as QbaselessQ and QimaginaryQ a Peace Now report that said that 73,102 apartment units were in various stages of approval in the West Bank and east Jerusalem.

Maariv reported that U.S. pressure is stalling a QhugeQ sale of large Israeli-made drones to Russia.

HaQaretz reported that the IDF is delaying the release of its own investigations into various incidents that took place during Operation Cast Lead due to concerns the information could be used in potential war crimes indictments against officers overseas.

HaQaretz reported that Israel and Turkey are involved in quiet but

intensive talks to end the crisis in relations between the two countries. According to a senior Jerusalem source, officials from both countries have exchanged messages regarding the need to restore relations to an even keel and hope to do so in the coming days. The messages sent by Israel and Turkey stressed the strategic value of their relationship.

HaQaretz reported that yesterday Ron Prosor, Israel's Ambassador to Great Britain, blasted London's decision to cancel the transfer of its Tel Aviv embassy to a building owned by Africa-Israel because of the company's role in building West Bank settlements. Prosor told HaQaretz that the move represented "surrender to those who slander Israel."

The Jerusalem Post reported that a short film decrying the blockade of Gaza released yesterday on the Internet by Yoni Goodman, the animation director of the acclaimed movie QWaltz with Bashir," was immediately blasted by conservative media expert Yariv Ben-Eliezer -Q David Ben-GurionQs grandson -Q as an Qugly, disgusting piece of work.Q HaQaretz also reviewed the film.

Yediot reported that former Israeli president Moshe Katsav could be indicted shortly for serious sexual offenses.

Major Hebrew-language media led with reports on repercussions of the recession in Israel.

HaQaretz reported that, after three years and almost 20 hearings, a trial still has yet to begin against Mas'ad Barikat, a Bedouin from the Sinai Peninsula suspected of smuggling weapons, drugs, and foreign workers from Egypt to Israel.

1. Iran:

Summary:

Columnist Ari Shavit wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QAn Israeli conservative [Benjamin Netanyahu] will try to convince an American Democratic president to act in the Iranian crisis the way John F. Kennedy did during the Cuban missile crisis. If Netanyahu succeeds, the West will be able to overcome the worst danger it has faced since the Cold War.

Block Quotes:

"Resolution 2010"

Columnist Ari Shavit wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (3/5): QAn Israeli conservative [Benjamin Netanyahu] will try to convince an American Democratic president to act in the Iranian crisis the way John F. Kennedy did during the Cuban missile crisis. If Netanyahu succeeds, the West will be able to overcome the worst danger it has faced since the Cold War. If he fails, Israel will face the most difficult dilemma in its history.... Just as the victory in 1948 emerged from a series of correct decisions David Ben-Gurion made in 1946 and 1947, so it is now. Israel's future depends on making wise, precise and courageous decisions. Livni decided that the person to make those decisions would be Netanyahu; this week she herself crowned him man of the hour. The Kadima chairwoman has thus forced Israelis to stand behind Bibi, who is about to take on a task of Ben-Gurionesque proportions.

2. Mideast:

Summary:

Very liberal columnist Gideon Levy sardonically wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QLabor Chairman [Ehud Barak] simply belongs in the defense post and on the Right's dream team.

Senior military affairs analyst Reuven Pedatzur wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QThe defense establishment will continue to develop [missile defense] systems as it sees fit. The army's top brass and Defense Ministry bigwigs know they are immune from criticism and do not have to answer for their mistakes.

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: QWhether [U.S.-Syria] relations freeze over again will depend very much on what [the U.S. envoys] hear from Assad.

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in Yediot Aharonot: QContrary to what you have been used to hearing in the world media, for you, Jews of Europe, Israel is not the problem. It is the solution.

Block Quotes:

I. "Barak for Defense"

Very liberal columnist Gideon Levy sardonically wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (3/5): QLabor Chairman [Ehud Barak] simply belongs in the defense post and on the Right's dream team. The public wants it and the Labor electorate wants it -- so run, Barak, run and get the desired job. It's his natural place: the Right. After the proven success of the worthless war in the Gaza Strip, we cannot do without his outstanding services. Iran will tremble, Hamas will shake: Hurray! Hurray! The next defense minister is on his way.... Barak will be the next defense minister, with or without his party. There are not many things more certain in Israeli politics. So we will repeat once again: Run, Barak, run. Put aside your party, which is not really your party, and join Netanyahu. [Far Right Knesset Member] Ketzeleh -- Yaakov Katz of the National Union Party -- will be your deputy, and that's all the strength you'll need.

II. "No Way to Intercept Rockets"

Senior military affairs analyst Reuven Pedatzur wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (3/5): QAnyone who has followed the defense establishment's decision-making process over the past eight years concerning the development of a missile defense system against rockets launched from Gaza cannot help but wonder how the IDF and the Administration for the Development of Weapons (ADW) have managed to make such poor and misguided decisions.... Sadly, ministers and lawmakers will not use the [critical State] Comptroller's report to rein in the defense establishment, the ADW and the IDF. The defense establishment will continue to develop systems as it sees fit. The army's top brass and Defense Ministry bigwigs know they are immune from criticism and do not have to answer for their mistakes.

III. QThe Significance of Going to Damascus

Diplomatic correspondent Herb Keinon wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (3/5): QWhile the decision to send Dan Shapiro from the National Security Council and Jeff Feltman from the State Department to Syria represents a shift in policy -- they are the highest ranking administration officials to go to Syria since deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage in 2005 -- it doesn't mean the U.S. is on the verge of a breakthrough with Syria. The Obama administration is very much in the policy review stage.... [The U.S. envoys] will want to hear Syrian President Bashar Assad's take on a whole gamut of issues, not only those related to Israel.... If the envoys don't like what they hear, then -- just as happened with Durban 2 -- the U.S. might simply conclude that the conversation was going nowhere and say there was nothing more to talk about until Damascus changed its tune. But if they hear something pleasant to their ears, Feltman and Shapiro may hold a series of talks with the Syrians, or the U.S. may want to ratchet up

the level of the diplomats conducting the conversation. Had the U.S. wanted to signal a serious thaw in relations, Mitchell -- or even U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton -- would be making the pilgrimage. Feltman and Shapiro represent not a thaw, but a de-icing. Whether relations freeze over again will depend very much on what they hear from Assad.

IV. QIsrael is the Jew of Yesteryear

Middle East affairs commentator Dr. Guy Bechor, a lecturer at the Interdisciplinary Center, wrote in Yediot Aharonot (3/5): QA [European] Jew can no longer walk in the street carrying Jewish symbols, stay in Jewish institutions that are not surrounded with police and guards, without being tightly closed and frightened. Yes, those who hide Jewish symbols and assimilate in society will survive -Q until unpleasantness arrives from their friends, their colleagues, school, and life.... This trend is rapidly growing in the world. It has nothing to do with Israel: Israel is the tool that allows one to reach achievements. Israel is the Jew of yesteryear.... What is the difference between 1939 and 2009? Today, as opposed to then, the Jews have a country, a successful, rich state, in which the standard of living is not as low as it used to be, compared with Europe.... Contrary to what you have been used to hearing in the world media, for you, Jews of Europe, Israel is not the problem. It is the solution.

13. U.S.-Israel Relations:

Summary:

Shmuel Rosner wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv: QThe man whom President Barack Obama intends to appoint as chairman of the NIC should be cause for great concern in Israel. At best, it is a strange appointment; at worst, it is dangerous.

Block Quotes:

"Bad News"

Shmuel Rosner wrote in the popular, pluralist Maariv (3/4): QThe National Intelligence Assessment that was published in the United States in 2007 was a serious blow for Israel. What was discussed was Iran, and the American intelligence community sent out a message that everyone could breathe a sigh of relief: The Iranian program for developing a nuclear bomb had been halted, they claimed. This ridiculous assertion, which has since been rectified, was deliberate. The goal was to prevent former President George W. Bush from launching a military strike against Iran in the last year of his term in office. Mission accomplished. [Charles QChas Freeman], the person responsible for that report carries a title that very few people are aware of: Chairman of the National Intelligence Council. The man whom President Barack Obama intends to appoint as chairman of the NIC should be cause for great concern in Israel. At best, it is a strange appointment; at worst, it is dangerous.... The list of Freeman's transgressions, in Israeli eyes, is long. Among his sins is the claim that Washington gives Israel a carte blanche to do whatever it wants, and that only American pressure can force Israel to do anything.... The person in question has raised much more biting criticisms of Israel and he will fill a very sensitive and vital role. In any case, Obama, who wants to maintain his image of being a friend of Israel, now faces a tough dilemma. The weapon that he has placed in the hands of those who claimed all along that his friendship was a facade and that his administration will let Israel down is especially lethal. And they will not be afraid to use it."

CUNNINGHAM